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Revisiting Adorno's Position on the Relation of Theory to Praxis

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Summary

Adorno's departure from praxis and his focus on theory seemed to be an unnatural move for a critical theorist. Among students and colleagues this was perceived as a serious aberration from Horkheimer's program. In this paper, two arguments in Adorno's favor are proposed: firstly, that, rather than separating the theory–praxis couplet, Adorno undertook necessary revisions which made theory more accurate in relation to a world that had undergone profound social, political and economic changes. The “old” theory was anachronistic, subjectless and left completely to the benevolence of blind actionism which represented a new form of (pseudo–) praxis. The author will attempt to demonstrate that Adorno held a firm position on the unity of theory and praxis. The second argument has to do with contemporary praxis. Revisiting Adorno's thoughts on theory and praxis can teach us two valuable lessons, namely: 1) that theory can reflect on itself, while praxis lacks this capability, and 2) that tactics applied in other societies cannot be imported blindly and unmediatedly because they are context–dependent. Both lessons are extremely valuable for contemporary social movements and especially for those inspired by Marcuse's version of activist critical theory. Adorno reminds us that resistance can easily slip into repression and that, before it can be changed through praxis, the world must first be (re)interpreted.

Key words: Theodor Adorno; praxis; actionism; critical theory; resistance; social movements

Introduction

The legacy of Theodor Adorno still has not waned, at least not in Europe.¹ To some extent this is unfair to another important figure – Herbert Marcuse. While,

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1 A special journal called Adorno Studies is dedicated to Adorno's philosophy. In the 1950's Adorno and Horkheimer returned to West Germany while Marcuse remained in exile for the rest of his life. This fact should not be overlooked when assessing the relevance which Adorno's philosophy has in Europe in comparison to Marcuse.

in Germany, Adorno's philosophy is still the subject of numerous books, there are no new editions on Marcuse (Zill, 2003). However, in recent years we have witnessed a renaissance of interest in Marcuse's interdisciplinary critical theory. Contemporary struggles and movements point to the undiminished potential of Marcuse's critical theory to provide guidance for praxis. However, it is because of this "guidance of praxis" that it is necessary to return to Adorno and revisit the question on the relation of theory to praxis. The rediscovery of Marcuse's ideas inspires present-day activists and movements. However, the line between praxis and pseudo-praxis is perhaps more blurred today than back in the 1960's. Adorno undertook serious revisions on the relation of theory to praxis. These revisions ought to be revisited again (and remembered) as they are both a necessary complement to Marcuse's activist version of critical theory and can help in differentiating between praxis and pseudo-praxis, a distinction which is crucial for any social movement.

The entire discussion on the alleged separation of theory and praxis started with the protests of 1968 and reached its peak on January 31, 1969 when Adorno called the police who arrested students in their attempt to occupy the Institute for Social Research. Marcuse, who was very supportive of the student movements in the U.S., could not comprehend Adorno's move and saw it as siding with the apparatus. However, the insurmountable barrier which stood between them was the Atlantic Ocean. On one side of the ocean was a liberal democracy with movements protesting against the Cold War, the Vietnam War, etc., while on the other there were Germany and Europe recuperating from the experiences and horrors of fascism. This fact determined the crucial contextual difference between protest movements in Germany and in the U.S. Adorno was aware that every movement could produce its very opposite. He feared that, regardless of how progressive a movement may seem, there was still a chance that it will relapse into various authoritarian forms. What was less known was the fact that, aside from the leftists, there were other students who also were critical of the U.S., namely, the Christian Democratic Students who held different political opinions. Christian Democratic Activists of the Association of Christian Democratic Students (RCDS) rose in opposition to the Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund (SDS): »Instead of expressing gratitude to their American protectors, radical students now routinely criticized and defied the United States, whose forces still occupied the city [...] Christian Democratic students [...] had a drastically different sense of what political commitment ought to entail in a city encircled by a socialist dictatorship« (Goltz, 2017, 91). Adorno was not alone in thinking that the leftist student movement can reignite fascist potential in Germany. RCDS shared the opinion that SDS fails to notice totalitarian similarities between fascism and communism: »Instead of recognizing the parallels between Nazism and Communism, which were so clearly apparent to him [Wohlrabe], they were focused on political repression in far-flung places and no longer cared about the fate of Germans to the east of the Iron Curtain« (Goltz, 2017, 96). In sum, these were the new historical circumstances which pushed for revision of the theory-praxis

relationship. Adorno's "new approach" was partly influenced by events in Germany.

1. Adorno's position on the relation of theory to praxis

Critical theory is the central theoretical platform developed by Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse. The main tenet of such a platform is the insistence on the unity of theory and praxis. The relation of this unity is marked by tension which necessitates sublation, and thus, praxis becomes revolutionary, and the theory that guides praxis is in itself a form of revolutionary activity. The conspicuous difference inherent in critical theory is its subversiveness towards the reality principle. This is what puts critical theory at odds with the traditional form of theorizing (Horkheimer, 2002). Hence, critical theory does not seek to interpret the world, it seeks to change it. This revolutionary program inherent in critical theory was something that attracted various individuals and groups who sought not only a theoretical guideline, but also a practical means of "combating" the injustices that late capitalism structurally produces. This implies, as Macdonald (2017, 8) argues, a critical empiricism and a commitment to radical transformation. Critical theory — and here it differs from traditional theory — does not differentiate between subject and object.

Among above-mentioned thinkers, it is Herbert Marcuse who stands out as the representative embodiment of scholar activism. From his early writings through to his later works, Marcuse remained dedicated to revolutionary praxis in a way that followed an "original" and "unrevised version" of critical theory. In *One-Dimensional Man* Marcuse (1964) faced the same problems of blocked revolutionary praxis as Adorno did later. Marcuse (1964) observed that the stabilization of capitalism and the bureaucratization of the Soviet version of socialism, the integration of the proletariat, the rise of consumer society and the mass media, contributed to a decline in revolutionary potential. Marcuse (1964) portrays a society in which the revolutionary class is comfortably absorbed into an affluent society, and thus no more classes or groups remain who would be willing to fight for radical social change. However, Marcuse does not end in a pessimistic tone. He relentlessly continues his lifetime quest for a revolutionary subject: »underneath the conservative popular base is the substratum of the outcasts and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted of other races and other colors, the unemployed and the unemployable. They exist outside the democratic process; their life is in most immediate and most real need for ending intolerable conditions and institutions. Thus, their opposition is revolutionary even if their consciousness is not« (Marcuse, 1964, 260). This was perhaps Marcuse's biggest delusion which continued to fuel his hopes for a revolution. A few years later, the protests of 1968 set Marcuse's hopes high again. In a letter to Adorno, dated April 5, 1969, Marcuse recognized »that the situation is not a revolutionary one, not even a pre-revolutionary one« (Adorno and Marcuse, 1999, 125). This fact, however,

did not compel Marcuse to make significant changes in his theory. He continued to pursue an “unrevised” theory which in time became wishful thinking.

Revisions, or so they were perceived, were undertaken by Adorno (and co-signed by Horkheimer). It should not come as a surprise that Marcuse’s activist version of critical theory attracted social movements more than what seemed to be Adorno’s rather conservative turnabout. Public perception of the time was best captured in the newspaper article proclaiming Marcuse as the only remaining member of the Frankfurt School supporting those who seek to realize the goals of critical theory (Kraushaar, 1998, 432). Adorno’s critics and students were certain that he deviated from his writings by being conformist in praxis (Leslie, 1999, 119).

However, this would be a crude oversimplification. Adorno admitted in a radio broadcast that he and Horkheimer were accused of resignation, but only largely because they refused to draw practical consequences from theory and to provide theoretical support for blind actionism (Adorno, 1998, 289–290). Bell (2014) emphasizes that Adorno’s alleged resignation should be understood in the historical context within which Adorno directly responded to the Frankfurt School’s critics of the radical left and defended his refusal to translate critical theory into a program for political action. Against the charge of apolitical ‘resignation,’ Adorno articulates a defiant vision of critical thought that remains vital today, despite the dated trappings of the theory–praxis debate.

Adorno’s position on the relation of theory to praxis underwent significant revisions that were, at the time, difficult to grasp for those who firmly believed that the world can be changed by guerrilla tactics (or through extra-parliamentary means) rather than through the democratic process (e.g. SDS). Krahll (wrongly) critiqued Adorno’s thought for not being able to define itself in organizational categories. This is why practical transformation of social reality loses its binding force (Krahll, 1975, 832). For Marcuse and the SDS, Adorno’s position on theory and praxis was untenable. While they insisted on a fusion between theory and praxis, Adorno wholeheartedly advocated the autonomy of theory and postponement of praxis. Hence, he became the target of the radical-wing sociology students’ attacks. Students distributed leaflets which read »Adorno as institution is dead« and »Whoever gives dear Adorno control will preserve capitalism for the rest of his life« (Kraushaar 1998, 418–432).

However, those revisions were much needed for several reasons. Firstly, theory had been lagging behind praxis, or better said, it had fallen into pseudo–praxis. Secondly, it seemed that theory should be advanced by (pseudo–)praxis²

2 A position firmly (and unjustifiably) held and advocated by Marcuse who argued that there are moments when praxis should push theory forward (Adorno and Marcuse, 1999, 125). In the lecture *Transition to Moral Philosophy* delivered January 26th 1965, Adorno questions the validity of the doctrine of the historical necessary conditions. Adorno argues: »But I should like [...] to plant a few doubts in your minds about the truth of it, particularly when we learn, if we study Marx or Hegel, that the Spartacus uprising in ancient Rome or the peasant movement in Germany [...] or Babeuf’s conspiracy under the Directory in France — that none of that would have worked because the historical conditions were not ripe. Whether historical conditions are

and could even result in the crushing of theory. Thirdly and most importantly is the fact that, in changed historical circumstances, critical theory proved inaccurate and could not grasp social reality. Hence, Adorno rightly considered that the new historical situation should first be interpreted. Revisiting Adorno's thoughts on theory and (pseudo-)praxis seems relevant for contemporaneity. It is the opinion of the author that contemporary social movements can easily be led astray by blind actionism and can fall into the pseudo-reality of the very same reality principle that they aim to negate. Hence, Adorno's thoughts on theory and praxis should serve as a reminder to reflect before acting.

2. *The theory–praxis problem*

2.1. *The new historical situation*

Let us begin by quoting Adorno's famous line: »Philosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed. The summary judgment that it had merely interpreted the world, that resignation in the face of reality had crippled it in itself, becomes the defeatism of reason after the attempt to change the world miscarried [...] Having broken its pledge to be as one with reality or at the point of realization, philosophy is obliged ruthlessly to criticize itself« (Adorno, 1973, 3). The sentence not only laments the proletariat's failure to seize the moment, but it also offers a glimpse into the theory–praxis problem. The fulfillment of the historical task of the proletariat, which theory had expected and hoped for, would at the same time be the end of pre-history (Marx) and theory. However, the moment was irreversibly lost and the "old" theory (resting on Marx's assumptions) continued to live in new historical circumstances. The "old" theory was anachronistic to new praxis and needed to be either completely built from scratch or revised in such way that it can accurately grasp the new historical moment. Hence, Adorno's turn to theory should be understood accordingly. Adorno's main argument is that praxis³ is postponed for the time being. The new historical situation poses a foundational challenge to critical theory, the program of which was based on revolutionary praxis.⁴ Hence, altered historical

ever ripe enough to let something happen is always judged after the fact [...] And it is very hard to say whether, given the extremely complex and often irrational structure of history, things might not have turned out differently for once [...] I should like at least to add a question mark to the tradition from which I have come [...] I should only wish to issue a general warning against automatically putting yourselves on the side of the victors, and joining in when people say what people always say when liberation movements are defeated, namely, that it happened because the conditions were not right. Hegel did indeed excoriate appeals to abstract possibility, as did Marx« (Adorno, 2001a, 181).

3 In Adorno's writings the term praxis has multiple and interrelated meanings. Freyenhagen (2014, 6) enumerates six principal meanings of which no. 3, 4 and 5 are relevant for this discussion: (1) as activity (*Tätigkeit*); (2) as productive labor; (3) as revolutionary activity; (4) as resistance and not joining in (*Widerstand und Nicht-Mitmachen*); (5) as *Aktionismus* and (6) as activity in a liberated society.

4 This required some serious revisions. Hegel's and Marx's theoretical inadequacies became part of historical practice and can thus be newly reflected upon in theory. Thus, praxis itself was a

circumstances call for revisiting the question: »What is critical theory?« It is in the interest of praxis that theory should have precedence: »The liquidation of theory by dogmatization and thought taboos contributed to bad practice. The recovery of theory's independence lies in the interest of practice itself [...] with theory paralyzed and disparaged by the all-governing bustle, its mere existence, however impotent, bears witness against the bustle. This is why theory is legitimate and why it is hated; without it, there would be no changing the practice that constantly calls for change. Those who chide theory anachronistically obey the *topos* of dismissing [...] and the target is theoretically missed« (Adorno, 1973, 143).

Adorno (1989) finds the main culprit for the discrepancy of theory and praxis to be the wrongfulness of Marx's immiseration thesis.⁵ The integration of the proletariat signaled the disappearance of the revolutionary agent.⁶ Practical misgivings of the existing versions of socialism in China and the USSR made the socialist alternative undesirable and presented an obstacle to liberation.⁷ In sum, these were the conditions which, in Adorno's view, justified the primacy of theory.

2.2. *The shift from revolutionary to transformative praxis*

The social and material conditions of late modernity compel Adorno to make the shift from revolutionary to transformative praxis. Transformative praxis is expressed through the idea of right living and the ethics of resistance.⁸ Adorno

theoretical concept (Adorno, 1973, 144).

- 5 Marx's emiseration thesis is the result of an analysis of the economic development of capitalism. In *The General Law of Capitalistic Accumulation* Marx (1995, 480) argues that further development of capitalism would emiserate laborers; that they would be replaced by the machines. Due to this technological development, the production would increase but there wouldn't be a rise in the salaries since the input of human labor remains the same.
- 6 Adorno (2002a) uses the term culture industry (that functions as an integrative force) to explain the integration of the proletariat.
- 7 For a detailed account and critique see Marcuse's *Soviet Marxism: A Critical Analysis*. Here Marcuse demonstrates two things: 1) serious deviations from Marx's theory that have happened in Soviet society, and 2) shared similarities between Soviet and capitalist societies. Technological development of Western societies, argues Marcuse (1958), enables parallel sustention of the military industry and raising living standard. This means that Soviet society actually supports the stability and unity of capitalistic society. In order to justify the official ideology, Soviet Marxism must, according to Marcuse (1958), petrify and stop the dialectical process, which is completely contrary to the internal structure of the dialectic. Marcuse (1958) also warns that the thesis of the mutual conflict between capitalist countries and the internal crisis of the system cannot serve as a major orientation for Soviet Marxism. Finally, the same factors which hindered the development of individuality and autonomy in Western society were at work in Soviet society: »the same mechanization and rationalization generated attitudes of standardized conformity and precise submission to the machine which required adjustment and reaction rather than autonomy and spontaneity. If nationalization and centralization of the industrial apparatus goes hand in hand with [...] the subjugation and enforcement of labor as a fulltime occupation, progress in industrialization is tantamount to progress in domination: attendance to the machine, the scientific work process, becomes totalitarian, affecting all spheres of life« (Marcuse, 1958, 84). Although Marcuse's prediction of the possibility of liberation in the USSR moving from superstructure to base ultimately proved to be wrong, the analysis and critique of Soviet society is relevant as an eastern counterpart of *One-Dimensional Man*.
- 8 *Refugee for the homeless*: »Wrong life cannot be lived rightly« (Adorno, 2005, 38).

proposes taking a defensive stance of resistance against the bad forms of life that late modernity structurally produces.⁹ This is what ignited students and critics who thought that Adorno went astray from the unity of theory and praxis. Although it may seem that Adorno abandons revolutionary ethics, the idea of right living has radical transformative potential that can be put in praxis, however, not through extra-parliamentary means¹⁰ but through the democratic process instead: »We might even say that the quest for the good life is the quest for the right form of politics, if indeed such a right form of politics lies within the realm of what can be achieved today« (Adorno, 2001b, 176). Adorno is aware that only a fine line separates resistance and repression and that the former can easily slip into the latter. (Passive) resistance is not completely harmless and it can be turned easily into its opposite despite the noble cause of those involved. Adorno (1998, 290) detects that the unity of theory and praxis has this tendency of slipping into the predominance of (oppressive) praxis. Thus, he warns that, even if resistance does not involve repression, it can still provoke it.¹¹ He further clarifies this point in a letter to Marcuse: »I would have to deny everything that I think and know about the objective tendency if I wanted to believe that the student protest movement in Germany had even the tiniest prospect of effecting a social intervention. Because [...] it cannot do that, its effect is questionable in two respects: firstly, inasmuch as it inflames undiminished fascist potential in Germany, without even caring about it and secondly, insofar as it breeds in itself tendencies which [...] directly converge with fascism« (Adorno and Marcuse, 1999, 131).

One can conclude that, by advocating withdrawal from public life, Adorno is proposing subjective inwardness. However, this would be far-fetched. Subjective inwardness and closing oneself off from the public sphere makes one complicit in pseudo-praxis. Thus, Adorno stresses the relevance of the material world and, in doing so, brings to the fore his true dedication to the basic tenets of critical theory — the insistence on transforming the relations of production: »Whatever an individual or a group may undertake against the totality they are part of is infected by the evil of that totality; and no less infected is he who does nothing at all [...] The individual who dreams of moral certainty is bound to fail, bound to incur guilt because, being harnessed to the social order, he has virtually no power over the conditions whose cry for change appeals to the moral *ingenium* [...] Without recourse to the material, no ought could issue from reason; yet once compelled to acknowledge its material in the abstract, as a condition of its own possibility, reason must not cut off its reflection on the specific material« (Adorno, 1973, 243).

Critical theory suffers from the same ailment as (pseudo-) praxis. This “illness” revealed the structural problems of critical theory. Its theoretical assump-

9 Adorno (1998, 203) also refers to the experiences of fascism and argues that political instruction should be centered upon the idea that Auschwitz should never happen again.

10 Something that Marcuse hoped for. Marcuse (1969, 68) argues that extra-parliamentary opposition can expose the destructive character of civil obedience to a reactionary regime.

11 E.g. the shooting of Benno Ohnesorg. The police officer who shot him was acquitted of charges!

tions are being questioned, and the whole project could collapse under its own weight. Adorno (1973, 245) is perfectly aware of this and argues that problems of practice ail even theory. The only recourse to avoiding unnecessary violence is to re–think both theory and praxis. Thus, Adorno responded by giving precedence to theory over praxis.¹² This move is often interpreted as his resignation and separation of the theory and praxis couplet, which was an emblematic feature of critical theory: »The Archimedian point – how might non–repressive praxis be possible, how might one steer between the alternatives of spontaneity and organization – this point, if it exists at all, cannot be found other than through theory« (Adorno, 1998, 274). Adorno was adamant that theory should not guide praxis, and on several occasions he (justifiably) rejected the idea.¹³ In *The New Manifesto* Adorno and Horkheimer (2010, 46) clearly stated that they are not proposing any mode of action. In the interview to *Der Spiegel* Adorno repeated that his writings could not be a platform for action and rather that his reflections stand in an indirect relationship to praxis: »Today's unfortunate relationship between theory and praxis consists precisely in the fact that theory is subjected to a practical pre–censorship [...] I still believe that one should hold on to theory, precisely under the general coercion toward praxis in a functional and pragmatized world« (Adorno, 2002b, 15–16).

2.3. *The unique ability of theory to reflect upon itself*

The crucial reason for giving precedence to theory over praxis is the unique ability of the former to reflect upon itself. While praxis may be an unreflective actionism that »devours its children«, theory possesses the unique feature of self–reflection. In the case of blocked revolutionary praxis the precedence of theory is justified because, »if I have the concept of reflection, the concept of practice implicitly postulates that of theory [...] What makes theory more than a mere instrument of practice is the fact that it reflects on itself and, in so doing, rescinds itself as mere theory. It can achieve this only by targeting true practice« (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2010, 57–58). This move distances theory from violence.¹⁴ Adorno argued that people should be discouraged from acting outwardly prior to reflecting on themselves. Hence, the only possible education was education directed toward critical self–reflection (Adorno, 1998, 193). Hence, in this view a theorist's engagement in the critical examination of facts is part and parcel of resistance: »By contrast the uncompromisingly critical thinker, who neither signs over his consciousness nor lets himself be terrorized into action, is in truth the one who does not give in« (Adorno, 1998, 292). In the resistance movement

12 Adorno (2000) argues that this is the case with Marx. Theses on Feuerbach cannot be understood if abstracted from the historical dimension. They are meaningful only in the case of anticipating a revolution. Marx isolated himself to recalibrate his theory once the revolution failed.

13 This is what puts Adorno at odds with Marcuse. Marcuse firmly argued that theory can be further developed by praxis. Adorno replied that they need to discuss this more thoroughly (Adorno and Marcuse, 125–127).

14 Exception is violence aimed at combating fascist regimes.

the theorist plays the role of public intellectual who uses mass media to reach audiences.¹⁵ The theorist acts in an educational and pedagogical way rather than as a revolutionary.¹⁶ Adorno (1998) advocated critical education through greater emphasis on studies in sociology and pedagogy. He considered that the enlightenment process of educating the educators could result in forming new cadres whose influence in the most diverse contexts would then finally reach the whole of society. This puts Adorno at odds with Marcuse who would rather be among students than on television and/or radio.

The task of revised critical theory is to create a new subjectivity. This can be done by liberating subjects from immersion into pseudo-praxis¹⁷ and by enabling a change in the consciousness: »Pseudo-reality is conjoined with, as its subjective attitude, pseudo-activity: action that overdoes and aggravates itself for the sake of its own publicity, without admitting to itself to what extent it serves as a substitute satisfaction, elevating itself into an end in itself. People locked in desperately want to get out. In such situations one does not think anymore, or does so only under fictive premises. Within absolutized praxis only reaction is possible and therefore is false. Only thinking could find an exit [...] The situation can be changed, if at all, by undiminished insight. The leap into praxis does not cure thought of resignation as long as it is paid for with the secret knowledge that that really is not the right way to go« (Adorno, 1998, 291).

Although Adorno “separated” the theory and praxis couplet by “resigning” with respect to the latter, he firmly holds that these are not on opposite poles, but rather both are a form of activity: »A consciousness of theory and praxis must be produced that neither divides the two such that theory becomes powerless and praxis becomes arbitrary [...] Thinking is a doing, theory a form of praxis [...] Thinking has a double character: it is immanently determined and rigorous, and yet an inalienably real mode of behavior in the midst of reality« (Adorno, 1998, 261). Adorno and Marcuse disputed over the relation of theory to praxis and students of Adorno critiqued him for betraying his own theory. However, critique is not completely founded. Adorno should not be seen as a “loose mandarin” going astray from the fundamental postulates of critical theory. Rather, he remained committed to the unity of theory and praxis (but rejected to equate praxis with pseudo-praxis). And thus, for the transition from pseudo-reality to reality to occur, one has first to (re)analyze and (re)interpret social order. Acting on the result of this analysis is what constitutes true and authentic praxis. Adorno stron-

15 Adorno's resistance in Germany included frequent TV and radio appearances as well as examining future teachers and educators.

16 For Marcuse (2005) the true nature of the philosopher is exemplified in Kierkegaard's move towards publicness. Macdonald (2018, 534–535) criticizes Adorno on this basis, arguing that Adorno was comfortable delivering critique in the classroom while he was appalled with the idea of standing at the barricades.

17 Namely from the collectivization in consumerist society. Adorno (1998, 165) noted that personality cannot be saved. But what should be preserved from this concept is the strength of the individual resisting to be swept into uniformity. Thus, it is only if the individual manages to incorporate objectivity within himself that he can develop resistance to it.

gly opposes blind and unenlightened actionism:¹⁸ »The neediness of the object is mediated via the total societal system; for that reason it can be determined critically only by theory. Praxis without theory, lagging behind the most advanced state of cognition, cannot but fail, and praxis, in keeping with its own concept, would like to succeed. False praxis is no praxis. Desperation which, because it finds the exits blocked, blindly leaps into praxis, with the purest of intentions joins forces with catastrophe. The hostility to theory in the spirit of the times, the by no means coincidental withering away of theory, its banishment by an impatience that wants to change the world without having to interpret it« (Adorno, 1998, 265).

Conclusion

Rather than abandoning praxis in favor of theory, Adorno attempted to recalibrate theory and render it more in tune with the new historical world. Only such theory can inspire and guide new praxis. Adorno was well aware that, without necessary revisions, all that was left of Horkheimer's program was theory from *tempi passati*. Instead of being at the forefront of praxis, the old theory functions as an all-around excuse for various movements caught in the vortex of pseudo-praxis. Thus, Adorno not only attempted to revise the basic tenets of critical theory but also to liberate individuals from their entrapment into the very reality principle they continued to negate. Adorno firmly remained dedicated to the critical theory program of dialectical sublation of the established reality principle.

Critical theory is not an academic discipline developed solely behind the walls of an ivory tower. It is an integral part of activism and a form of praxis. Hence, the conclusion that may be drawn should not remain a dead letter. It should, to a certain extent, inform contemporary praxis by drawing important lessons from Adorno's views. This is especially true of Marcuse's renaissance. What comes to mind is Marcuse's notorious essay *Repressive Tolerance*. Marcuse (1970) labels as progressive by default all movements coming from the left and argues that movements from the right should not be tolerated. It is an extreme position that Adorno fears and of which Adorno actually warns when arguing that movements can end up as their very opposite. Adorno and Christian Democratic Students were correct in their critique and in pointing out similarities between fascism and communism which the leftist students failed to realize. Because of their disrespect for democratic structures and intolerance, Habermas labeled German student movements as "left-wing fascism". Not every leftist demand, much less movement, is progressive by definition. Marcuse's concepts and his activist version of critical theory may perhaps be useful for some leftist movements and social struggles, but on the flip side, some of them could easily end up as "left-

18 One example is when German students attempted to unmediatedly import guerilla tactics into Western democracies: »Things might be different with the guerrilla tactics of the Third World; nothing in the administered world functions wholly without disruption [...] Models that do not prove themselves even in the Bolivian bush cannot be exported« (Adorno, 1998, 269–270).

wing fascism". Hence, one should keep in mind that before blindly following any precepts, one should reflect on the context and not simply import those tactics that proved useful elsewhere. Adorno warns that it is easy to fall into the trap of pseudo-praxis and thus, instead of enacting the desired change, to contribute more to preserving the established reality rather than ending up with some form of left-wing totalitarianism.

The legacy of Theodor Adorno can still shape modern theoretical debates.

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Preispitivanje Adornova stava o odnosu teorije i prakse

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Sažetak

Adornovo napuštanje prakse i akcentiranje primata teorije činilo se nesvojstvenim potezom za kritičkoga teoretičara. Među kolegama i studentima Adornov potez shvaćen je ozbiljnim odstupanjem od Horkheimerova programa. U ovom radu iznose se dva argumenta. Najprije se nastoji pokazati kako kod Adorna nije posrijedi izričito razdvajanje teorije od prakse, nego je riječ o nužno potrebnjoj reviziji koja bi trebala iznova aktualizirati teoriju u svijetu koji je prošao kroz duboke društvene, političke i ekonomske promjene. "Stara" teorija bila je anakronistička, bez subjekta i potpuno izručena nerefleksivnomu akcionizmu, koji je predstavljao novi oblik (pseudo)prakse. Zatim se pokazuje da je Adorno zadržao čvrsto stajalište o jedinstvu teorije i prakse. Drugi argument odnosi se na suvremenu praksu. Preispitivanje Adornovih misli o teoriji i praksi može podučiti dvama vrijednim lekcijama: 1. teorija može reflektirati na sebe samu, a praksa nema tu mogućnost; 2. taktike iz drugih društava ne mogu se slijepo i nerefleksivno uvoziti, jer su one određene društvenim kontekstima. Obje lekcije izuzetno su vrijedne za suvremene društvene pokrete, a posebno za one koje nadahnjuje Marcuseova varijanta aktivističke kritičke teorije. Adorno podsjeća da se otpor može lako pretvoriti u represiju i da svijet, prije nego što se može promijeniti praksom, mora biti iznova protumačen.

Ključne riječi: Theodor Adorno; praxis; akcionizam; kritička teorija; otpor; društveni pokreti

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